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SUBJECT: Pres. Bashir Interview with Saudi News Channel  
on Darfur and Development

¶1. Summary: On April 17, Riyadh Al-Ikhbariyah Satellite Channel in Arabic broadcast an interview of President Bashir by Sharif Husayn Sharif. During the broad-ranging interview, Bashir commented on the Darfur conflict and characterized it as a tribal issue. He claimed the Darfur problem had taken the Government by surprise, as it had been focused on peace negotiations with the South. He denied incidents of ethnic cleansing and collective rape, and insisted that regional and international intervention has hamstrung Darfur's traditional methods of conflict mediation, without which ongoing peace efforts would fail. Bashir went on to laud the nation's economic and developmental advances in the past year. He noted Sudan's excellent relations with African, Asian, and Arab countries, singling out Saudi Arabia. He credits this with launching a wave of investment that has allowed progress in the services, education, and health sectors in Sudan. End summary.

¶2. The main body of the interview is as follows:

(Begin text)

(Sharif) Observers have witnessed Sudan's success in playing host to the Arab summit, an important Arab meeting, which was held in Khartoum a few days ago. Can you brief us on this obvious Sudanese endeavor to bring the Arabs together by hosting this summit?

(Al-Bashir) In the name of God, the merciful, the compassionate. First of all, we praise Almighty God for this success because it would not have been a success without support from God and without efforts by those who prepared for this important summit. This summit was preceded by the African summit, which also was an excellent experiment, thanks to the team responsible for the preparation of the summit. This team also contributed to making the Arab summit a success. However, the most important factor in the success of this summit was Sudan's external relations with all the Arab states. We emphasize that these relations are excellent. They enabled us to hold a successful Arab summit, which resulted in perfect unanimity. God be praised, this summit was free of any disputes or wrangling.

(Sharif) Neutral observers have been witnessing a qualitative economic development in Sudan, in terms of foreign investment, and the infrastructure improvement, which is being witnessed by visitors and observers alike, as well as the bridges, construction projects, and the oil sector. Can you brief us on this?

(Al-Bashir) Once again, we praise Almighty God. Success cannot be realized only by material resources. We say that God blessed the efforts of the sincere Sudanese youths in all fields. This success has been achieved because of the economic stability, which has been

realized by tremendous efforts and under unfavorable domestic and international circumstances. We are still subjected to economic sanctions by Western countries and major financial establishments. However, through the enlightened administration of the economy and the country's stability, the economy became the basic element that attracted investment.

Secondly, efforts have been exerted to secure the oil fields and to attract capable companies to work in the oil sector after Western companies refused to work in the oil sector in Sudan and indeed impeded this work for many years. The efforts of the brothers who led the process of exploring, exporting, or refining the Sudanese oil, led by Dr Awad al-Jaz, played an important role in oil production. The peace that has been realized in the south created a position climate and imparted a sort of confidence in the hearts of investors. You are aware that capital is coward and before committing itself it has to be certain of its position.

Therefore, God be praised, we are witnessing a wave of investment or an investment offensive on Sudan, which placed Sudan at the forefront of states that received investment last year. Because of these combined efforts you can see development projects in everything, not only in terms of streets and bridges but also in all aspects - services, education and higher education, and growth in health services. There have been great efforts to establish treatment in local hospitals on a strong basis, not only in Khartoum but in all Sudanese provinces as well.

There has been stability in power generation, which was one of the primary problems that the people had been facing. There have been economic and security stability. All these efforts contributed toward the development projects that everyone has been witnessing.

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(Sharif) The great transformation in Sudan was the result of the implementation of the comprehensive peace agreement between the north and the south. Based on this success, observers have felt that great efforts have been exerted in reach for a solution of the Darfur crisis, which has been going on for the past few years. The Abuja negotiations are a proof of this. How do you view these negotiations?

(Al-Bashir) Definitely the issue of Darfur took us by surprise because our efforts had been pooled to realize peace. We know the benefits of peace in terms of domestic stability, preserving the homeland's manpower, and stopping dissipation of resources. Peace gives us the opportunity of exploiting Sudan's huge natural resources. However, it is obvious that after this success, our enemies realized that peace was imminent in southern Sudan and they started working to create the Darfur sedition. The Darfur problem started as a tribal issue. There were tribal struggles between neighboring tribes over the meager resources there or because of friction between youths in various areas.

Darfur has a very strong heritage, which is being taught in Harvard, the most respectable US university; namely, the Darfurian tradition in solving disputes through the Ajawids [mediators]. Thus, regional and international interventions hampered the Darfurian traditions in resolving disputes, and hostile Western media started to propagate stories that have nothing to do with the Darfurian society, such as the talk about mass annihilation, ethnic cleansing, and collective rape. These have been lies but we are aware that the powerful, scientific, programmed, and guided media gave this issue its current dimensions.

However, we are interested in realizing genuine peace in Darfur. We are certain that the national unity government's vision of a solution to the Darfur issue was a sound vision and was appreciated by all observers. We hope that efforts in Abuja will be crowned by realizing a peace agreement. However, genuine peace cannot be

realized except within Darfur itself. The current large-scale efforts are intended to bring about reconciliation among the tribes because the peace agreement in Abuja will not realize peace until social peace and reconciliation have been established and until differences have been bypassed and the Darfurian heritage in solving disputes among tribes in Darfur has been applied.

(Sharif) After playing host to the Arab summit and the African summit, Sudan intends to host the Pacific-Caribbean summit perhaps next December. Sudan also has witnessed a rapprochement in its relations with world countries, especially Western nations. Can you talk to us about this issue?

(Al-Bashir) God be praised, we have been devoting great attention to our foreign relations. We have passed through a real crisis in our foreign relations after the Gulf war and its repercussions. Indeed, Sudanese diplomacy succeeded in bypassing all our differences, especially within our regional surroundings. This greatly helped us improve our relations with other countries. Now we can say that our relations with African and Asian nations are excellent. We can reasonably say that we have relations with the West but pressure groups are trying to impede the positive development of our relations with the West. However, we can say that our relations with the nations of the south are excellent. This is proven by the fact that all of them, especially in the African, Caribbean, and Pacific nations agreed to hold their summit in Khartoum, God willing.

(Sharif) Your Excellency, this is a question on the longstanding and strong relations between Sudan and the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia. These relations have witnessed bolstering and progress over the past number of years. Can you explain to us the special relations between Saudi Arabia and Sudan?

(Al-Bashir) God be praised, our relations with the Kingdom are extremely excellent. We have received special attention from the custodian of the two holy mosque King Abdallah, who has been playing a great role, not only in bolstering Sudanese-Saudi relations but because in all his meetings with world leaders who visit the Kingdom, the issue of Sudan has always been a permanent point on the agenda of the talks, defending Sudan, explaining Sudan's real position, and demanding backing for Sudan in various domains.

We have also received assistance for all of our development projects from Saudi Arabia, especially the project of the century, the Merowe Dam Project, which is mainly financed by Arab funds, including the Saudi Fund,

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which led the process to finance the project.  
(End text)

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